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ACTION EUR-12

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 EB-07 CIEP-01 TRSE-00 STR-01 OMB-01 CEA-01

COME-00 SIL-01 LAB-04 ACDA-05 /083 W

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R 241703Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UK, EEC (NI)

SUBJECT: SCOTTISH LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE

1. SUMMARY: MARCH 21-23 SCOTTISH LABOR PARTY (SLP) CONFERENCE, AS ANTICIPATED, WAS CONTENTIOUS FORUM FOR DEBATE OF DEVOLUTION AND EC MEMBERSHIP ISSUES. CONFERENCE DECISIONS ON BOTH QUESTIONS, HOWEVER, SURPRISED DELEGATES AND OBSERVERS ALIKE. GENERALLY RESTRAINED DEVOLUTION DEBATE ENDED WITH CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATION, AFTER EX-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CEEDINGLY TIGHT VOTE, OF MINIMAL DEVOLUTION OF POWER TO

PROPOSED SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY. EC DEBATE WAS EMOTIONAL AND ACRIMONIOUS WITH OUTCOME WHICH WAS ALSO UNEXPECTED: ANTI-MARKET RESOLUTION WAS APPROVED BY CLOSE VOTE, LEAVING PRO-MARKETEERS GREATLY HEARTENED. MOST NOTABLE ASPECT OF PRIME MINISTER WILSON'S ADDRESS TO CONFERENCE WAS ITS REASONED, LOW KEY APPEAL FOR SUPPORT OF GOVERNMENT'S EC POSITION WHICH MAY HAVE SWAYED SOME DELEGATES. CONFERENCE ALSO VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY TO REMIT (AND THEREBY KILL) RESOLUTION CALLING FOR WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH TROOPS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND. END SUMMARY

2. DEVOLUTION WAS FIRST ISSUE ADDRESSED BY SLP CONFERENCE, PROVIDING CONSIDERABLE INTEREST ON OPENING DAY. SLP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, WHICH HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN UNSYMPATHETIC TO DEVOLUTION, SOUGHT, ON ONE HAND, TO PRE-EMPT THOSE FAVORING MAXIMAL DEVOLUTION OF POWER TO ELECTED SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY BY ISSUING ITS OWN PROPOSAL FOR LIMITED DEVOLUTION (TEXT POUCH), AND, ON THE OTHER HAND, TO RESTRICT SCOPE OF RESOLUTION REACHING CONFERENCE FLOOR THROUGH ITS CONTROL OF PROCEDURAL MACHINERY. MAXIMAL DEVOLUTIONISTS, LED BY BACKBENCH MP JIM SILLARS, BELIEVED THEY HAD THE VOTES TO CARRY CONFERENCE AND PERMITTED THEIR RESOLUTION TO BE WATERED DOWN BY ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE, PREFERING TO FIGHT ON CONFERENCE FLOOR RATHER THAN IN COMMITTEE ROOMS. BOTH SIDES WERE AWARE THAT EMOTION RAN HIGH ON THIS QUESTION AND COLLABORATED TO AVOID ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE.

3. CONTENTIOUS ASPECTS OF DEVOLUTION WERE QUICKLY NARROWED TO TAX POWER AND CONTROL OF INDUSTRIAL POLICIES, ESPECIALLY THE SCOTTISH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OPPOSED DEVOLUTION OF SUCH AUTHORITY TO ASSEMBLY, WHILE SILLARS FORCES ARGUED THAT FAILURE TO GIVE ASSEMBLY THESE POWERS WOULD LEAVE IT HOLLOW SHELL, AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT, CONCEDE THE FIELD TO SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS WHO ARGUE THAT INDEPENDENCE IS ONLY WAY SCOTS WILL HAVE VOICE IN THEIR OWN DESTINY. FLOOR DEBATE INDICATED LARGE NUMBER OF TRADE UNIONS, WHICH CONTROLLED NEARLY 85 PERCENT OF CONFERENCE VOTE, WERE LINING UP WITH SILLARS GROUP. YET WHEN VOTE CAME, CONFERENCE REJECTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FLOOR RESOLUTION AND ENDORSED EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S LIMITED PROPOSAL BY 353,000 TO 341,000, A MARGIN OF 12,000 VOTES. BOTH SIDES WERE STUNNED BY THIS OUTCOME.

4. POST-MORTEM OF BALLOT INDICATED THAT SUBSTANTIAL MINORITY OF TRADE UNION BLOC VOTES WAS CAST FOR THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE PROPOSAL AND THAT CONSTITUENCY PARTIES WERE UNANIMOUS IN SUPPORT OF THIS POSITION. IN ADDITION,

A CRITICAL 15,000 TRADE UNION VOTES COMMITTED TO THE SILLARS GROUP HAD NOT BEEN CAST. OVERCOMING THEIR ASTONISHMENT, THE MINIMAL DEVOLUTIONISTS WERE MAGNANIMOUS IN VICTORY. SCOTLAND SECRETARY WILLIAM ROSS, IN LATER STATEMENT TO MEDIA, STRESSED CLOSENESS OF OUTCOME AND PROMISED THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD TAKE PROPOSALS CONTAINED IN DEFEATED RESOLUTION INTO FULL ACCOUNT WHEN PREPARING DEVOLUTION LEGISLATION. THIS CONCILIATORY APPROACH WAS LATER REINFORCED IN 1975-76 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ELECTION WHEN MAXIMAL DEVOLUTIONISTS INCREASED THEIR REPRESENTATION FROM 5 TO 8 (INCLUDING SILLARS) ON THIS 21-MEMBER BODY.

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5. SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER WILSON AND EC DEBATE HIGHLIGHTED SECOND DAY OF CONFERENCE. WILSON REVIEWED LABOR GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS AND PLANS, THEN RECAPPED RESULTS OF EC NEGOTIATIONS AND ASKED CONFERENCE TO SUPPORT GOVERNMENT'S RECOMMENDATION THAT UK REMAIN IN EC. FLOOR DEBATE THAT FOLLOWED WAS HEATED AND BITTER. ON TWO OCCASIONS CONFERENCE REJECTED THE CHAIRMAN'S EFFORTS TO

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CLOSE DEBATE, THUS PUSHING CONFERENCE INTO OVERTIME AND UPSETTING TIMETABLE. THE BALLOT, WHEN IT FINALLY CAME, PROVED NEARLY AS SURPRISING AS THE EARLIER VOTE ON DEVOLUTION. AGAIN THE TRADE UNION BLOC DIVIDED, AS DID THE CONSTITUENCY PARTIES (EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WAS SPLIT 11 TO 10 AGAINST CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP). A RESOLUTION THAT "THIS CONFERENCE STATES ITS OUTRIGHT OPPOSITION TO CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP IN THE EEC AND REJECTS ANY POLICY OF RENEGOTIATION" WAS APPROVED BY 346,000 TO 280,000, FAR LESS THAN THE 2 TO 1 DEFEAT ANTICIPATED BY MANY PRO-MARKETEERS. A CRITICALLY LARGE NUMBER OF BALLOTS, THIS TIME 83,000, WERE NOT CAST. CONFERENCE ALSO OVERWHELMINGLY ENDORSED A SECOND RESOLUTION DEMANDING THAT GOVERNMENT COUNT AND ANNOUNCE THE RESULTS OF EC REFERENDUM ON REGIONAL RATHER THAN NATIONAL BASIS.

6. FINAL DAY OF CONFERENCE WAS LARGELY DEVOTED TO DOMESTIC ISSUES, INCLUDING RESOLUTION CALLING FOR WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH TROOPS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND AND THEIR REPLACEMENT BY UN FORCES. CONFERENCE SUPPORTED EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION THAT THIS RESOLUTION BE REMITTED AND THEREBY PIGEON-HOLED. ON ECONOMIC FRONT, CONFERENCE APPROVED THREE OTHER RESOLUTIONS WHICH: SUPPORTED SOCIAL CONTRACT; CALLED FOR NATIONALIZATION OF OFF-SHORE OIL AND GAS; AND DEMANDED ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO LIMIT ADVERSE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF OIL EXPLOITATION.

7. COMMENT: RESULT OF DEVOLUTION VOTE LEFT THOSE FAVORING GREATER POWERS ANGRY AND BEARISH ON PROSPECTS THAT LABOR PARTY WILL BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND SCOTTISH NATIONALIST ONSLAUGHT AT NEXT GENERAL ELECTION. MINIMAL DEVOLUTIONISTS WERE DELIGHTED WITH OUTCOME BUT RECOGNIZE THIS POLITICAL DANGER AND APPEAR WILLING TO CONSIDER GOING

BEYOND LIMIT DESCRIBED IN LAST YEAR'S DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT TIMING MAY BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN SUBSTANCE IN THE FEUD OVER ASSEMBLY POWERS. IF THE GOVERNMENT IS ABLE TO CONVENE SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY WELL BEFORE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION AND ASSEMBLY IS ABLE TO IMPACT ON SCOTTISH AFFAIRS, EFFECTIVENESS OF NATIONALIST SIREN SONG WOULD BE LIMITED. THIS, OF COURSE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ASSUMES SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS DO NOT GAIN MAJORITY IN NEW ASSEMBLY, AND THE MEXVM LISTS CONSIDER THIS A DUBIOUS ASSUMPTION INDEED. DICKSON MABON, PRO-MARKET LABOR MP AND LEADER OF LABOR'S EUROPEAN COMMITTEE, TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE WAS SURPRISED AND DELIGHTED WITH CONFERENCE VOTE ON ECISUE. HE IS CONFIDENT THAT EFFECTIVE PRO-MARKET CAMPAIGN CAN SWING MAJORITY OF LABOR VOTERS IN SCOTLAND TO A PRO-MARKET POSITION IN REFERENDUM, THOUGH HE ALLOWED THAT SCOTLAND AS A WHOLE WOULD PROBABLY VOTE AGAINST CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP. HIS SENTIMENTS WERE ECHOED BY OTHER PRO-MARKETEERS, INCLUDING TRADE UNIONISTS AS WELL AS MPS. FROM NUMBER OF UNCAST BALLOTS ON THIS ISSUE (OVER 12 PERCENT OF TOTAL) IT WOULD APPEAR THERE IS STILL A LARGE NUMBER OF UNDECIDED VOTES AND THAT PRO-MARKETEERS ARE NOT UNDULY OPTIMISTIC. WE ALSO BELIEVE TENOR OF PRIME MINISTER'S REASONED APPEAL FOR SUPPORT WAS MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN FINAL VOTE. REGARDING REFERENDUM TALLY, WE UNDERSTAND GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY RETREAT FROM ITS EARLIER POSITION AND PERMIT REGIONAL VOTE COUNT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MEMBERSHIP, MEETING REPORTS, PARTY MEETINGS, RELATIONS WITH REGIONAL ORGS, RESOLUTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON04517
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750102-0764
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750322/aaaaatxm.tel
Line Count: 257
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <20 MAY 2003 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SCOTTISH LABOR PARTY CONFERENCE
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UK, EEC, SLP
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006